

George Anthony). Ultimately, however, the action-packed international intrigue—and Stevens's keen sense of pacing—carry the book; readers who can put aside their skepticism will be riveted. (Mar.)

#### PAPERBOY: A Memoir

HENRY PETROSKI. *Knopf*, \$25 (384p) ISBN 0-375-41353-7

In this subtle, engaging memoir, Petroski reminisces about his idyllic 1950s Catholic boyhood in Cambria Heights, Queens, as a member of a guild of paperboys. The headlines of the *Long Island Press*, which the author used to deliver on his cherished Schwinn, capture the time: “McCarthy Wants to Question Accusers”; “DiMag Says Bums Can’t Win Series”; “U.S. Has No Rocket Like Sputnik’s.” Petroski recalls the ’50s with such memories as the Sunday night *Ed Sullivan Show*; bike rides to the Carvel stand for dipped soft ice cream cones or shakes; and, in the basement of his suburban home, a wet bar and American Flyer electric train set placed on crates. Petroski, a professor of civil engineering and history at Duke University, has a knack for fleshing big stories out of simple premises (he traced the cultural history of the fork, the paperclip and the Post-it in *The Evolution of Useful Things*; in *To Engineer Is Human*, he chronicled human progress through engineering failures). By recollecting his old paper route, Petroski gives readers a warm, nostalgic riding tour of his youth and foreshadows the engineer-to-be in the boy who by nature relished the “simple mechanical pleasures,” from the mechanics of a nun’s habit to delivering a paper: “as every paperboy knows, the hardest thing in the world is to fold every paper perfectly and to flip it squarely onto the stoop from a speeding bike.” (Mar.)

#### THE SWORD OF ISLAM:

**Muslim Extremism from the Arab Conquests to the Attacks on America**

JOHN F. MURPHY JR. *Prometheus*, \$26 (350p) ISBN 1-59102-010-7.

This sweep of the history of Islamic extremism suffers from a lack of focus and a failure to confront complex questions. Murphy, a military historian, covers a lot of ground, beginning his story with the birth of the prophet Muhammad in A.D. 571 and ending with the Sept. 11 attacks and the U.S.-led war on terrorism in Afghanistan. But most of the book looks at the 20th century’s sporadic outbreaks of anti-West violence. All too often this account feels like a list of atrocities, without interpretation and context. In just a few pages, for example, Murphy jumps from the rise of Nasser in Egypt to the creation of the Turkish state to the rule of the Shah in Iran. He doesn’t delve in any depth into the conditions, whether internal or external, that led to today’s Islamic militancy. In his epilogue,

Murphy further fails to explore the quandary of where the U.S. campaign should go next, yet repeatedly cheers it on—making his book feel like a patriotic high school history textbook. (Mar. 30)

#### “A PROBLEM FROM HELL”:

**America and the Age of Genocide**

SAMANTHA POWER. *Basic*, \$30 (600p) ISBN 0-465-06150-8

★ Power, a former journalist for *U.S. News and World Report* and the *Economist* and now the executive director of Harvard’s Carr Center for Human Rights, offers an uncompromising and disturbing examination of 20th-century acts of genocide and U.S. responses to them. In clean, unadorned prose, Power revisits the Turkish genocide directed at Armenians in 1915–1916, the Holocaust, Cambodia’s Khmer Rouge, Iraqi attacks on Kurdish populations, Rwanda, and Bosnian “ethnic cleansing,” and in doing so, argues that U.S. intervention has been shamefully inadequate. The emotional force of Power’s argument is carried by moving, sometimes almost unbearable stories of the victims and survivors of such brutality. Her analysis of U.S. politics—what she casts as the State Department’s unwritten rule that nonaction is better than action with a PR backlash; the Pentagon’s unwillingness to see a moral imperative; an isolationist right; a suspicious left and a population unconcerned with distant nations—aims to show how ingrained inertia is, even as she argues that the U.S. must reevaluate the principles it applies to foreign policy choices. In the face of firsthand accounts of genocide, invocations of geopolitical considerations and studied and repeated refusals to accept the reality of genocidal campaigns simply fail to convince, she insists. But Power also sees signs that the fight against genocide has made progress. Prominent among those who made a difference are Raphael Lemkin, a Polish Jew who invented the word *genocide* and who lobbied the U.N. to make genocide the subject of an international treaty, and Senator William Proxmire, who for 19 years spoke every day on the floor of the U.S. Senate to urge the U.S. to ratify the U.N. treaty inspired by Lemkin’s work. This is a well-researched and powerful study that is both a history and a call to action. Photos. (Mar.)

#### BAD ASTRONOMY: Misconceptions and Misuses Revealed, from Astrology to the Moon Landing “Hoax”

PHILIP C. PLAIT. *Wiley*, \$15.95 paper (288p) ISBN 0-471-40976-6

Plait, a science writer who works in the physics and astronomy department at Sonoma State University, is appalled that millions of Americans don’t believe the moon landing really took place—and do believe that Galileo went blind from looking at the sun, or that they can make an egg stand on end only on

the vernal equinox. To set the record straight, he debunks these and many other astronomy-related urban legends in this knowledgeable, lighthearted volume. The early chapter “Idiom’s Delight” sets the stage by clearing up the scientific inaccuracies in everyday expressions—as in the phrase “light years ahead,” for example, which is used to indicate timeliness or prescience when light years are actually a unit of distance. In later chapters, Plait explains meteors, eclipses, UFOs, and the big bang theory, revealing much about the basic principles of astronomy while clearing up fallacies. With avuncular humor, he points out the ways advertising and media reinforce bad science and pleads for more accuracy in Hollywood story lines and special effects. This book is the first in Wiley’s Bad Science series on scientific misconceptions (future titles will focus on biology, weather and the earth). (Mar.) **Forecast:** *If every entry in the series is as entertaining as Plait’s, good science may have a fighting chance with the American public. Expect respectable sales, for the paperback format is nicely suited for armchair debunkers.*

#### THE AFTERLIFE EXPERIMENTS:

**Breakthrough Scientific Evidence of Life After Death**

GARY E. SCHWARTZ WITH WILLIAM L. SIMON, FOREWORD BY DEEPAK CHOPRA. *Pocket*, \$25 (400p) ISBN 0-7434-3658-X

Schwartz (*The Living Energy Universe*), director of the Human Energy Systems Laboratory at the University of Arizona, proposes “working with a group of top mediums who have consistently received messages, supposedly from the dead,” to investigate whether or not there is indeed life after death. Armed with consummate authority (e.g., logic, scientific research and the focus of a recent HBO documentary), the book progresses through the lab’s findings. Of particular fun are the session transcripts, which include running commentary provided by lead investigators. (One sitter describes a medium’s performance as “dead on.”) That their data will convince readers, the authors believe, is a foregone conclusion: “[E]ven skeptics will begin to evolve as a result of these findings.” Yet the story comes off like high-grade magic or a splendid infomercial. Despite the reliance on experts (such as magicians, scientists and videographers), the narrative has the suspect tone of a sideshow Barker. All the same, Schwartz embraces an admirable passion for curious knowledge and adamantly resolves to uphold his survival-of-consciousness hypothesis until research proves otherwise. (Mar.)

#### MAKING SENSE OF LIFE:

**Explaining Biological Development with Models, Metaphors, and Machines**

EVELYN FOX KELLER. *Harvard Univ.*, \$29.95 (352p) ISBN 0-674-00746-8

Keller (*The Century of the Gene*), pro-